Understanding the 2,300 “Evenings and Mornings” of Daniel 8:14

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NOTE: This article has been superceded by the later research in *A Closer Look: Daniel 8:14 Re-examined.* It has been left online as a legacy post. Please refer to the newer article for important insights not covered here.

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At the 2017 Evangelical Theological Society meeting in Providence, Rhode Island, I had a conversation with a friend about the meaning of the 2,300 “evenings and mornings” mentioned in Daniel 8:14. The subject came up as we were discussing some aspects of the eschatology research I began in August 2017, which, among other things, has taken me into a deep study of the entire book of Daniel. This conversation brought home to me that there were differences of opinion as to how the 2,300 “evenings and mornings” should be understood. I decided to undertake a focused study on the passage and its surrounding context to hopefully understand it better, and would like to share with you some insights that came out of that work.

What Matters is What the *Bible* Says

We could spend considerable time evaluating what various Bible commentators have had to say about the 2,300 “evenings and mornings.” One website (https://www.wake-up.org/time-periods/2300-days-daniel-8-14.html) observed that, of an assortment of “prominent scholars” between the years AD 430–1781 that dealt with the meaning of the 2,300 “evenings and mornings,” 21 claimed the 2,300 days represented years; six said they denoted the number of days to reach the end of the world; three claimed the period was 2,300 literal days; and one opined that the time represented 1,150 24-hour days. Folks, this diversity of opinion—which continues to our day—does not exactly engender confidence that a solution can be easily found! Nor does it mean that I, who would boldly sally forth into theological territory the prudent avoid, can come up with a better alternative than those who have gone before me. Nevertheless, when I stumble upon a workable solution offered by others to a seemingly intractable exegetical problem, as I did in this case, it seems good to pass it along.

The Text of Daniel 8

Let us first see what Daniel 8:3–14 says (NASB; a few phrases have been emphasized in **bold** for special attention):

[3] Then I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, a ram which had two horns was standing in front of the canal. Now the two horns *were* long, but one *was* longer than the other, with the longer one coming up last.
[4] I saw the ram butting westward, northward, and southward, and no *other* beasts could stand before him nor was there anyone to rescue from his power, but he did as he pleased and magnified *himself.*
[5] While I was observing, behold, a male goat was coming from the west over the surface of the whole earth without touching the ground; and the goat *had* a conspicuous horn between his eyes.
[6] He came up to the ram that had the two horns, which I had seen standing in front of the canal, and rushed at him in his mighty wrath.
[7] I saw him come beside the ram, and he was enraged at him; and he struck the ram and shattered his two horns, and the ram had no strength to withstand him. So he hurled him to the ground and trampled on him, and there was none to rescue the ram from his power.
[8] Then the male goat magnified *himself* exceedingly. But as soon as he was mighty, the large horn was broken; and in its place there came up four conspicuous *horns* toward the four winds of heaven.
[9] And out of one of them came forth a little horn, which waxed exceeding great, toward the south, and toward the east, and toward the glorious *land*.

[10] And it waxed great, even to the host of heaven; and some of the host and of the stars it cast down to the ground, and trampled upon them.
[11] It even magnified itself to be equal with the Commander of the host; and it removed **the regular sacrifice** from Him, and the place of His sanctuary was thrown down.
[12] And on account of transgression the host will be given over to the horn along with the regular sacrifice; and it will fling truth to the ground and perform its will and prosper.
[13] Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to that particular one who was speaking, "How long will the vision about **the regular sacrifice** apply, while the transgression causes horror, so as to allow both the holy place and the host to be trampled?"
[14] He said to me, "**For 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the holy place will be properly restored**."

The angel Gabriel then explains in verses 8:20-26 the meaning of the above vision:

[20] "The ram which you saw with the two horns represents the kings of Media and Persia.
[21] The shaggy goat represents the kingdom of Greece, and the large horn that is between his eyes is the first king.
[22] The broken horn and the four horns that arose in its place represent four kingdoms which will arise from his nation, although not with his power.
[23] In the latter period of their rule, when the transgressors have run their course, a king will arise, insolent and skilled in intrigue.
[24] His power will be mighty, but not by his own power, and he will destroy to an extraordinary degree and prosper and perform his will; he will destroy mighty men and the holy people.
[25] And through his shrewdness he will cause deceit to succeed by his influence; and he will magnify himself in his heart, and he will destroy many while they are at ease. He will even oppose the Prince of princes, but he will be broken without human agency.
[26] **The vision of the evenings and mornings** which has been told is true; but keep the vision secret, for it pertains to many days in the future."

What is clear to virtually all conservative interpreters is that Daniel 8:20–22 refers to Alexander the Great, the "large horn" king of Greece, from whose empire his four generals arose and parceled it out among themselves. This was an event that took place "many days in the future" from Daniel's time, about four centuries later.

Normal hermeneutics would lead us to expect that verses 20–22 establish, simply as a matter of context, that their era sets the time frame for understanding the **entire** prophecy covered by Daniel 8:3–26: that in the absence of any clear indications to the contrary, the whole passage deals with the time of Alexander the Great and its immediate aftermath.

This impression is apparently confirmed by Daniel 8:23, “in the latter period of ***their rule***.” Whose rule? Contextually, the rule of the four generals of Alexander who arose out of Alexander’s broken-up realm. When was the “latter period” of these generals? Known history indicates it was just prior to the Maccabean uprising, which spelled the effective end of that rule as far as the Jews were concerned. And what instigated the Maccabean rebellion? The desecration of the Second Temple by Antiochus IV Epiphanes, a descendent of Alexander’s general Seleucus. The description of Antiochus Epiphanes in v. 23, as “insolent and skilled in intrigue,” is consistent with what is known about him: his political machinations, his pride, the warfare he waged, his persecution of the Jews, the placing of the desolating abomination in the Second Temple (where he in effect opposed “the Commander of the host,” “the Prince of princes,” God), and his being “broken without human agency,” which is consistent with his death from disease as reported in 2 Maccabees.

The Vision about the “Evenings and Mornings”

These details indicate that the context for understanding “the vision of the evenings and mornings” is the time of Antiochus, not an eschatological time some 2,300 years later. Viewing “evenings and mornings” (note well, it does not say “days,” and we cannot assume without analysis that the phrase means this) as figuratively meaning “years” is contextually unsupported, and amounts to subjectively reading onto the passage a theological/eschatological viewpoint developed from outside it. We must not set aside the immediate context of Scripture, regardless of whether respected commentators may have done so.

The six days of Creation are described thus in Genesis 1: “and there was evening, and there was morning.” To most conservative interpreters, an evening-and-morning period in Genesis is a 24-hour day, so in the absence of any clear indications to the contrary, we should default to that understanding of the evening-mornings in Daniel 8. Provisionally taking the 2,300 evening-mornings as 2,300 days obliges us to look for a significant anchor point about six years prior to Antiochus' desecration of the Second Temple.

However, we cannot identify a known historical event to provide such an anchor. The best guess of conservatives seeking to understand the 2,300 period as literal 24-hour days—the solution promoted in the *ESV Study Bible*, following such commentators as Matthew Henry and Keil—is that there is an **approximate** fulfillment between the time of the murder of the high priest Onias III by the corrupt usurper Menelaus until Judas Maccabeus rededicated the Temple. But this is only approximate, which appears to be out of keeping with the evening-morning precision applied to the number 2,300. It seems we must search for a better answer, one that understands the "evenings and mornings" as meaning something other than "days."

The Vision about the "Regular Sacrifice"

As explained above, verse 8:11 indicates that the one who removes the "regular sacrifice" from God, and through this act metaphorically "throws down" (desolates) His sanctuary, is Antiochus. This sets the stage for understanding these words in 8:13: "How long will **the vision about the regular sacrifice** apply, while the transgression causes horror, so as to allow both the holy place and the host to be trampled?" The **bolded** phrase is an exact analogue to what we read in 8:26, "**the vision of the evenings and mornings**"; both verses speak of the same vision, emphasizing different aspects. Therefore, we should be looking for an understanding of the 2,300 "evenings and mornings" as something connected with the resumption of normal Temple sacrifice practice after its interruption by the desecration wrought by Antiochus.

I recently found a proposed solution that takes into account both the context of the passage in Antiochus' time—the interruption of the regular daily sacrifice—and the evening-morning precision of the 2,300 period. First, we need to understand what Scripture says about the "regular sacrifice," that is, the continual burnt offering referred to in Daniel 8:11. Exodus 29:38–42 gives us the details (NASB, emphasis added):

Now this is what you shall offer on the altar: two one year old lambs each day, continuously. **The one lamb you shall offer in the morning** [Heb *boqer*] and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight [Heb '*ereb*]; and there *shall be* one-tenth *of an ephah* of fine flour mixed with one-fourth of a hin of beaten oil, and one-fourth of a hin of wine for a drink offering with one lamb. **The other lamb you shall offer at twilight**, and shall offer with it the same grain offering and the same drink offering as in the morning, for a soothing aroma, an offering by fire to the LORD. It shall be **a continual burnt offering** throughout your generations at the

doorway of the tent of meeting before the LORD, where I will meet with you, to speak to you there.

We learn from this that the regular offering, the “continual,” involved one sacrificed lamb in the morning and another in the evening. The continual regular sacrifice thus was not one sacrifice per day, but actually two, involving an '*ereb* and a *boqer*. Now, compare this with the Hebrew words used in Daniel 8:13-14: “For how long is the vision concerning the regular burnt offering, the transgression that makes desolate, and the giving over of the sanctuary and host to be trampled underfoot?” And he said to me, “For 2,300 evenings ['*ereb* in the singular] and mornings [*boqer* in the singular]. Then the sanctuary shall be restored to its rightful state.” In other words, 2,300 evening-mornings. The same two words. Is this significant?

I think it is. Look again at the context of verses 8:13 and 14. The question asked is not, “***How far in the future will the vision start to be fulfilled?***”, which would expect an answer in years (since 8:26 tells us that the vision as a whole “pertains to many days in the future”). Rather, it is “***How long will the regular sacrifice be disrupted?***”, which looks for an answer connected with the actions of Antiochus. The NIV agrees with the NASB in affirming that this is the meaning of verse 13: “How long will it take for the vision to be fulfilled—the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, the rebellion that causes desolation, the surrender of the sanctuary and the trampling underfoot of the LORD's people?” It is not about the “many days in the future” when the vision starts to be fulfilled, but how long the process of fulfillment plays out.

In short, we have to stay anchored to the context of the passage, both in terms of its time frame and its subject. The time frame in question is the aftermath of Antiochus' desolating the Temple, while the subject is the regular “continual” sacrifice. Since we know that the “continual” involved sacrifices in the evening and the morning (the Jews reckoned their days as beginning in the evening), we ask, “Might the 2,300 evening-mornings refer to 1,150 days of twice-daily sacrifices?”

A Precise Solution to the 2,300 Evening-Mornings

In what follows I am indebted to Fred P. Miller for the keen insights into the prophecy of Daniel 8 in the following analysis, posted at http://www.moellerhaus.com/2300.htm. He points out that precise dates for the beginning and end of Antiochus' desecration of the Second Temple are known. 1

Maccabees 1:54 gives us the date of the abomination as Kislev (December) 15, 167 BC, while 1 Maccabees 4:52–53 tells us the Temple was rededicated on Kislev 25, 164 BC. (The Jews remember this date in their celebration of Hanukkah.) These two dates span a total of 3 years and 10 days.

Now, if we compare the "time, times and half a time" expression used in Daniel 7:25 with the "forty-two months" of Revelation 13:5 for the same period when the Antichrist exercises authority, we see that Daniel reckoned a year to be 360 days long:

Dan 7:25 He [Antichrist] shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and shall think to change the times and the law; and they [the saints] shall be given into his hand for a ***time, times, and half a time***.

Rev 13:5 And the beast [Antichrist] was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words and it was allowed to exercise authority for ***forty-two months***.

Comparing Revelation 12:6 with Revelation 12:14 yields the same result:

Rev 12:6 Then the woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God, so that there she would be nourished for ***one thousand two hundred and sixty days***.

Rev 12:14 But the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, so that she could fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for ***a time and times and half a time***, from the presence of the serpent.

When we plug this 360-day year into the three full years spanned by the desecration of Antiochus, we account for 1,080 days. To this we must add the intercalary (leap) months used by the Greeks to periodically get their calendar synced up with the seasons. How long were those months? Herodotus, the Greek "Father of History," helps us answer that question. Writing around the year 445 BC, in a dialogue about happiness between Croesus and Solon, he states:

Seventy years I regard as the limit of the life of man. In these seventy years are contained, without reckoning intercalary months, twenty-five thousand and two

hundred [25,200] days. Add an intercalary month to every other year, that the seasons may come round at the right time, and there will be, besides the seventy years, thirty-five [35] such months, making an addition of one thousand and fifty [1050] days. The whole number of the days contained in the seventy years will thus be twenty-six thousand two hundred and fifty [26,250], whereof not one but will produce events unlike the rest (https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/ancient/herodotus-creususandsolon.asp).

Let's follow along with Herodotus to find out how long the year and intercalary months were in his day. Dividing 25,200 days by 70 years yields 360 days per year, just as in our Scriptures above. The length of an intercalary month in the Greek system—probably that followed in Antiochus' day, since he was a Greek—is found by dividing 1,050 days by 35 months, yielding 30 days per intercalary month. Over our 3 years and 10 days period, having a 30-day intercalary month in the first and third years ("every other year," as Herodotus put it) adds 60 days. We then total it all up—years, intercalary months, plus 10 extra days: 1,080 + 60 + 10 = 1,150 days.

This is exactly the number of days covered by 2,300 evening-morning regular sacrifices. It is yet another indicator of the inspiration of Scripture, a marvelously precise fulfillment of what Gabriel revealed to Daniel about the duration of Antiochus Epiphanes' desolation of the Second Temple. I commend this solution to you for understanding the 2,300 "evenings and mornings" of Daniel 8:14. Adopting it also eliminates giving the false impression that we somehow need to accommodate 2,300 years into our eschatological understandings. We can thereby avoid an unfruitful rabbit trail as we try to think God's thoughts after Him, as we study Daniel and other eschatology-focused Scriptures.

Original Link:
https://biblearchaeology.org/research/the-daniel-9-24-27-project/4362-understanding-the-2-300-evenings-and-mornings-of-daniel-8-14